

# The Legacy of Lord Trenchard

Wing Commander  
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# Contents

And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!  
*King Lear*, Act III, Sc. II

	<i>page</i>
Acknowledgements	viii
Preface	ix
1 The Pioneers	1
2 The Smuts Report	16
3 Trenchard	28
4 The Experiment in Air-Power	46
5 The Bomber Will Always Get Through	60
6 Hoist on Hyperbole	75
7 The Practicalities of War	89
8 Bombing Policies	105
9 The Scandal of Hamburg	119
10 The Battle of Berlin	132
11 The Rape of Dresden	154
12 The Post-mortem	174
13 Post-war Doldrums	184
14 Future Defence Prospects	196
Epilogue	208
Appendix I Air Ministry Directive to the Air-Officer- Commanding-in-Chief, Bomber Command dated 10 June 1943	211
Appendix II Extracts from the Interrogation of Albert Speer, 18 July 1945	214
Bibliography	218
Index	221

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## Preface

The experience of twenty-six years' commissioned service in the Royal Air Force, coupled with an enquiring mind, led me to write this book. I was a fighter pilot, never a bomber pilot, and I thank God for that. I do not believe I could ever have obeyed orders as a bomber pilot; it would have given me no sense of achievement to drop bombs on German cities. The qualities demanded of bomber pilots were poles apart from those of fighter pilots. The former were captains of crews, thus responsible for their discipline in the air, for their morale and steadfastness, for the efficiency of the complicated equipment in the bombers. The fighter pilot was in theory a member of a team of twelve pilots all flying together in formation. In fact, they tended to be broken up into single units the moment they became engaged with the enemy—in the earlier days of the war at least. Then, each man was on his own. The average fighter pilot was a jumpy creature, pacing the room while he talked, smoking far too many cigarettes for his good. The bomber captain tended to smoke a pipe.

Fighter pilots had to be fatalists—what will be done will be done. But bomber crews had to be fatalistic to the *nth* degree. They also had to possess fortitude; if they lacked that quality they had to pretend they had it.

This book is not about the aircrews of Bomber Command. Operations are brushed over, operational fatigue hardly mentioned. These considerations would require another and different book, and this one is concerned with policies and strategies at the highest level. But in the writing I have always had those bomber crews in mind. They, after all, bore the brunt of the strategic air offensive against Germany during the years 1939-45. And one of the reasons I wrote this book was to explain to any of them

who cared to read it the thinking behind the orders they were given. They carried out these orders with the utmost gallantry and fortitude.

There is rather more in this book, however, than an examination of the planning and policies which culminated in the wiping off the face of the earth of the seventy great cities of Germany. In this context I do not raise the cry 'morality', although such execution was immoral enough, but certainly not as brutal as some of the activities indulged in by Hitler and Stalin. I do pose the question what might have been if British targeting policies had been thought through with greater intelligence.

For many years I entertained grave doubts as to the rectitude of the policies of the Air Staff both during the war and afterwards, and I did not remain silent about my feelings. I was, however, startled out of my senses when, in the early 1950s, it became obvious that prevailing policies would lead inevitably to the disbandment of Fighter Command, which would lead on to the crippling of the air defences of Britain, the most vulnerable of all the great industrial nations to attack from the air. The somewhat bland theory appeared to be that as Fighter Command and associated air defence systems could not achieve 100 per cent protection of the V bomber bases, it would be prudent to scrap the system, leaving London, for example, undefended, and relying completely on the bombers. But I had heard this before, and it did not work. This was to put the cart before the horse, spend the money on the dubious offensive and neglect the all-important air defence system. This, in fact, amounted to the perpetuation of the theories of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Trenchard, which I had examined for historical interest and analysed.

Nevertheless, despite my doubts, this was not the moment to take precipitate action; the policy-makers were, surely, older and therefore wiser men than oneself and the blacks and whites they painted on the picture might, with luck, transform themselves into shades of grey. But this was not to be. The position worsened when an attempt was made to stretch the viability of the V Force into the 1980s. It became impossible in the mid-1960s when the TSR2 and F111 projects were obviously going to be buried and the Air Staff prepared their plans to snatch the Fleet Air Arm from the Navy. I knew from my study of military strategy that

the demise of the Fleet Air Arm would render ineffective the Navy's role in preserving the sea communications on which Britain utterly depends. I could not go along with this and I asked permission to retire prematurely from the RAF. After this was granted I was able to speak my mind and began to discuss what was, in my opinion, best for the national interest. Out of these discussions and my earlier researches came this book. I have prepared the ground and sown the seeds: I hope that a reasonable consideration of my ideas may enable them to be developed.